

DUXBURY BAY

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Section B

Town Landings: Duxbury's Best Kept Secrets

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Duxbury's 16 town landings and seven "public ways to the water" are some of the best kept secrets in town, despite the fact that most landings are over 150 years old.

The secrecy surrounding town landings arises from many causes. First, many of these ancient landings are tucked into well-established seaside neighborhoods, and neighbors usually don't want their locations publicized. This desire is somewhat justified as many landings are really only accessible by foot, eliminating access by the general car-driving public. Also, most town landings have no signs pointing out their locations, and some of the paths to the landings are so overgrown that the landings are nearly hidden. There are some cases where the access to a landing is a shared drive to adjacent houses, creating the feeling of private prop-

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TOWN LANDINGS

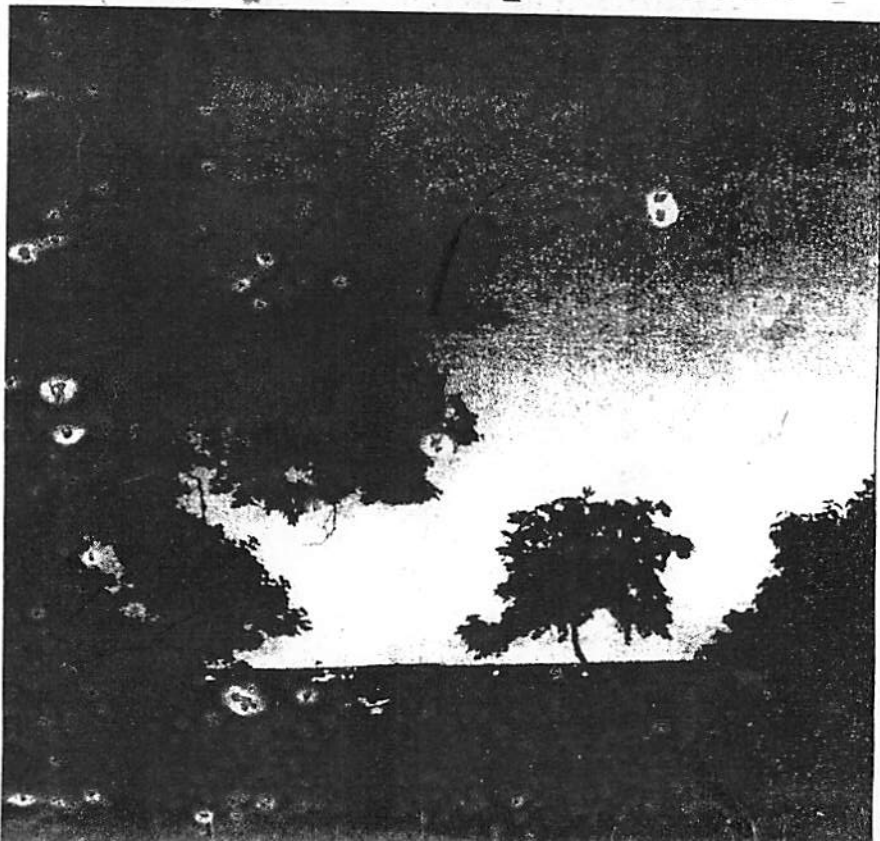
This is the first of three-part series focusing on the town landings.

Part 1 details town landings and delves into the histories of the six oldest landings.

Part 2 examines the push to create new town landings in the early 1900s.

Part 3 focuses on the issues surrounding town landings and how they have been controversial through the years.

taining the original copy of the last town landing committee's 1975 report complete with color photos is missing from the town clerk's files. Fortunately, duplicate maps and reports do exist.



neighborhoods, and neighbors usually don't want their locations publicized.

erty. Finally, there are instances where abutters have encroached upon town property to the extent that it is almost impossible to tell what land is public and what is private without a plot plan in hand.

And finding maps of some of these town landings can be difficult, because someone has ripped out the plans showing landings' locations and boundaries from books at the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds. Also, the binder con-

shrouded in secrecy, town landings and their purposes are much misunderstood. Many people believe landings are boat launch areas. However, this is only one use of a town landing. Mattakeesett Court (the town pier) and Howland's Landing on Standish Shore are both used for launching boats, but Josselyn Ave., Winsor St. and Water St. are only footpath landings, providing access to the water. Launching a motor boat at these places is impossible.

Historically, landings were used to land the sea's bounty, whether it was salt hay, fish, or shellfish. The oldest landing dates back to 1715. Mar. 17 were

The overgrown approach to this public landing at the end of Water Street illustrates why Duxbury's 16 landings are some of the town's best kept secrets.

Photo by Susanna Sheehan

officially recorded in 1834 and again in 1898. Others are more recent, being established in the early 1900s.

Town landings have frequently been the source of controversy between adjacent private property owners and the public. For over 100 years, the town has used numerous committees to study and document its town landings. One committee that formed in 1893 took six years to examine town landings

and report its findings and recommendations. After that 1899 account, others were generated every few years until 1921. Most recommended town officials preserve the current landings and seek new ones.

In 1974, Duxbury town meeting voted to appoint a new committee to examine and identify with signs all the landings. That committee reviewed all the previous information and in 1975, published its report

and recommendations, many of which are still in effect today.

Defining a Town Landing

The 1975 report definition states: "Town landings are designated areas to which the town has an undoubted right, which have been surveyed and recorded with the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds to

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Point Bridge landing, which it called "of fairly recent origin, having been laid out by the County Commissioners in 1870."

Anchorage Lane "by Old Mill Pond"

The oldest public landing in Duxbury is on Anchorage Lane off St. George St. It is thought to date back to 1715, according to the 1899 committee report. Located by "Old Mill Pond by Blue Fish River," it adjoins land formerly owned by Amherst A. Frazar and then by Samuel A. Frazar. In the early 1900s there was a boundary dispute over this landing, and in 1902, town meeting voted to authorize the town landing committee to settle the question of this area and employ an attorney if necessary. Now this landing is rarely used for access to the water and but it is perfect for nature observation.

Bluefish River "by Old Mill Dam"

This landing is undoubtedly older than when it was first mentioned by a committee in 1900 since its report states: "that the town owned a part of this wharf is no new discovery," and because this area was active in the previous century. In

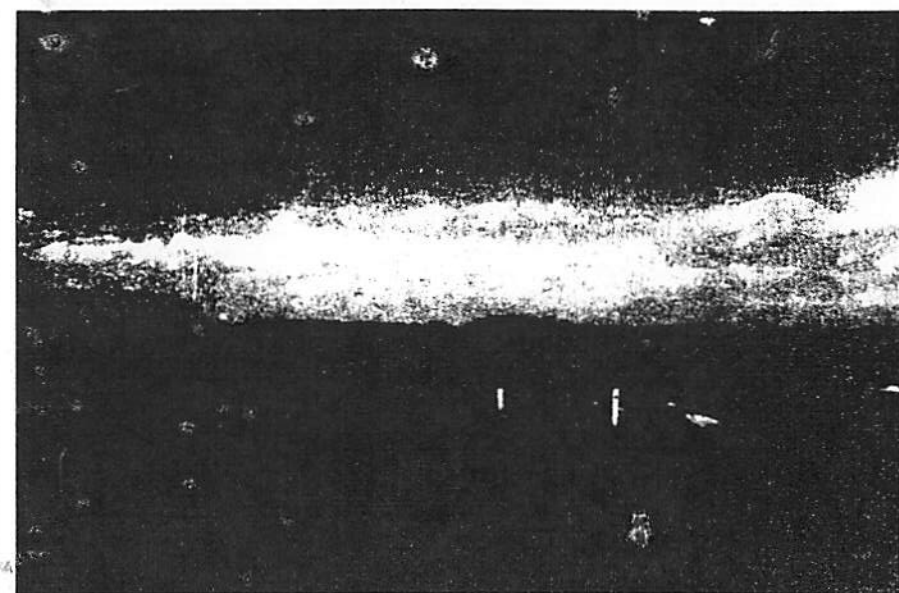
could be put it to reduce wash-out and erosion. In 1992, Conservation Administrator Joseph Grady and then-building inspector Kevin McDonald drew a plan for reducing erosion from storm water run off, but nothing has ever been done with it.

Drew Salt Works, Simeon Soule's and Clark Peterson's Landings

From Cove St. along Powder Point Ave. there are three more old town landings facing the Back River: Drew Salt Works at the end of Bay Pond Rd., Simeon Soule's landing about halfway down Powder Point Ave., and Clark Peterson's landing (also known as Dr. Bumpus's landing) about three-quarters down the avenue before the bridge.

Drew Salt Works was defined as a town landing in 1834. It is not well-used today and exists primarily as an access to the Back River marsh. The access to it is at the end of Bay Pond Rd., and it seems as though one is traveling over private property to reach the landing. Although a car can drive to it, this landing is best accessed by foot.

Simeon Soule's landing is also a very old landing. In a town document from 1794, it is



One of three public landings providing access to the Back River is the Drew Salt Works Landing on Powder Point

photo by Susanna Sheehan

to the marsh before the Powder Point Bridge. Like many of the entries to landings, this paved lane seems as though it travels over private property because of the homes only a few feet away on either side. However, it is an active landing and is the site of anchorage of quite a few motor boats, many of which belong to shellfishermen.

Powder Point Bridge Landing

over a hundred miles of coast from Boston harbor to Provincetown."

This area is one of the largest and most active town landings. On the south side there is an upper and lower parking lot and a boat launch area. At high tide, boaters and windsurfers frequent the landing, and at low tide people search here for shellfish. There is a teeny access strip on the sandy north side, but it borders a larger area

to opening up access in the Bay Rd. and Standish Shore areas because as the town started its development as a summer community with homes being built on the water, there began to be fewer ways for the public to reach the ocean. "We have done something toward establishing the bounds of the old town landings...and have added a few new landings. But much more should be done," stated a 1909 landing report. "There is very

lowed the No. 1 Fire Engine House to be built next to the landing. Now that building houses the harbor master's ATVs (all terrain vehicles) used on Duxbury beach. An unpaved launching area used for small craft exists behind at this landing, and the adjacent parking lot is frequented by Blue Fish River bridge jumpers.

Cove Street

Cove St. on the Back River, officially dates to 1834, a year when many landings were similarly designated. Called "Old Cove," it was described in the 1899 report as "the most valuable one that the town possesses." This landing flourished into the early part of this century until the drawbridge on the Powder Point bridge was eliminated. Tall ships brought their cargoes of lumber, coal, molasses, rum and hemp up into this landing via Duck Hill River, which was at least 3 feet deeper than it is now. Cove St. was also used as a bathing beach with at least 20 bathhouses and a dozen boathouses in the 1920s. It is currently used as an anchorage and, minimally, as a boat launching area. It has a small parking area, but it has serious problems with erosion and drainage. The 1975 committee recommended bringing in loads of sand and gravel to expand the beach and create spaces for 10 parked cars. It wanted the site to be surveyed to determine how a small culvert or drain

lectmen as "the Old landing place near Simeon Soule's." It also has dates on the town books of 1803 and 1834. It is behind land formerly owned by the Ellison family. Access to this landing is over a dirt right-of-way. It is currently used as a small boat anchorage and an entrance to the waters of the Back River.

Dating to 1834, Clark Peterson's landing (Bumpus's landing) is the last public entry

of the West End

The Gurnet, Long, or Powder Point bridge was first erected in 1872, but the landing was created in 1870. In 1901, this town landing was officially recorded with County Commissioners as a "Highway to the Sea." If that sounds confusing since the landing is in Duxbury bay, consider that in 1909, a report stated that the water at this landing was "the deepest water of any landing in

or private property and is not frequently used.

As the 19th century drew to an end, Duxbury continued to solidify its grasp on its historic landings while looking toward creating new passages to the water in the future. Town landing committees turned their eye

little opportunity for citizens and visitors to get to and enjoy the shore unless their land runs to the water." In the early 1900s, the town successfully obtained nine more public landings.

Next week's story will examine how this came about.

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